

I'll start off by saying that I love bump-in-the-night type stuff without buying into it at all, you don't have to believe any of it, you just need an imagination strong enough to scare yourself. People tend to go overboard with their bullshitting too much, and it's always obvious when they do, because it's structured like a cheap horror story, with cliché money shots teenagers go to when they think of something scary. It's the subtle things that are the creepiest, things you can't even begin to wrap your mind around, that's why they're the most fun.

I've had very few genuinely unexplainable things happen to me throughout my life so far, and by unexplainable I mean from what I saw from my perspective I could never have enough context to reason them away, and I like it like that. I'll tell this one story as accurately as possible, it's completely mundane, but that's how a lot of my favorite "real" spooky stories are.

I was probably about eight or nine, spending the night over my (at the time) best friend's condo that bordered a thick patch of woods. It was some weekend in the fall, and after asking our dads and all that kid drama over being allowed to spend the night, I was dropped off during the day and, like usual, we spent most of that day playing in the polluted ditch out back and running around in the woods. Some of this is me filling in gaps as best as I can, because it was almost twenty years ago, but I remember something happening earlier in the day that probably set off the whole thing, some nonsense in the late evening that gets that creepy feeling rolling for the night.

Like other imaginative, caffeinated kids, we manufactured a kid mythology explaining all the most mundane things in a fun way using bits and pieces of the stupid crap we watched and played. The creek and woods behind my friend's condo was the biggest target for this. As far as we knew we were the only people we ever saw back there, so it was up to us to decide what it really was, explorers' rights and all that. There was a marshy section with large thorned bushes we called the Thorn Plantation, where the ground was practically quicksand (it was probably just muddy) and deep inside it some thorns were as big as your hand (they

definitely weren't), or another corner of the woods absolutely packed with thick brambles we called Hell House. Obviously, we didn't see these woods as some sort of fairytale land. After all, to suburban kids woods might be fun, but they were definitely creepy, which as long as you kept it under control, made it even more fun.

Any group of woods in the middle of the suburbs is going to have teenagers screwing around in it, and while we never caught them in the act, we definitely came across the aftermath. Wet, moldy mattresses and sofas covered in condoms, blank paper thrown all over a field in the morning, a mounted deer head hanging from a rope in a tree. This was all very, very weird stuff to a kid. I can't remember for sure if we suspected older kids of doing it, because BS kind of takes on a life of its own if you talk about enough, but we came to the conclusion that Weirdos must be doing it, whoever they were. They went from being a goofy explanation to basically bogeyman when the situation demanded. All of the things we invented about them became the gospel truth when we were scared enough. They lived somewhere deep in the woods, came out at night and did all sorts of weird shit for whatever reason, or no reason, because somehow that was even scarier.

Getting back to that particular day, I remember us being out towards the back part of the woods, where my friend was showing me some god-awful treehouse he was putting together with crooked nails and scrap wood. Being the hardcore son of a bitch I was, I remember bringing with me my new orange-and-transparent-plastic snub nose cap gun to show it off, and of course to protect us from anything stupid enough to show its face.

Our imagination got riled up somehow, as it usually did. I think we heard something in the trees, a thicker part of the woods where we really couldn't go, and all of the leaves had already fallen, so this became much more unsettling than it normally would have been. Talk quickly turned to Weirdos, and my friend convinced me to try to scare them away with the cap gun. I fired off a few shots as threateningly as possible, but the quiet

afterwards just highlighted every little twig snapping for a mile around. It was still plenty bright outside, so all of this, while creepy, was in mostly good fun, and we made our way back sometime later.

The period from then until maybe one in the morning is pretty much lost to me now, I can't remember if that uneasiness escalated gradually throughout the evening or just started showing up again later on when we were sleep deprived and everything was quiet in the house. I have very vague memories of thinking we were chased from the woods by something earlier in the day, but I can't say for sure if it really happened or it was bullshit we made up to tell people later on. Either way, we're sitting at a computer in the living room playing ancient game demos, up way later than we were supposed to be. What happened next is a little fuzzy.

We heard his dad came down the stairs and set something in the kitchen. From the way the condo was laid out, the little alcove the PC was in blocked the view of both the stairs and kitchen by way of a thin island stacked with shit, so we were trying hard to focus on Might and Magic or whatever to look like we were ignorant of the time in case he looked around the corner caught us. It was a minute of us not saying a thing, barely breathing and hoping he would just walk back upstairs without noticing the PC area light on and us sitting there. Everything was dead silent, and we almost started laughing, imagining him sitting there trying to hear us while we did the same. But it went on and on, if he really thought we were there, wouldn't he just look around the corner? That's when my friend got up and peeked around the corner.

Nobody. There was a clothes basket sitting on the floor of the kitchen, but nothing else. Something like that immediately sets kids into a defensive mode, something so scary that they just play denial. He went back up the stairs, we just didn't hear him, right? The clothes basket was probably there before, etc. You don't remember if it was there before, it might have been, you're too scared to remember. This was the catalyst for a whole night of freaking the hell out. All the lights were turned on, we searched

every inch of the small first-floor. Nothing, of course. We carefully went upstairs and cracked the door to his dad's room, and saw him sleeping, just adding fuel to the fire.

Fast-forward about an hour or two, we are absolutely convinced that A) there's a Weirdo in the house, or B) it's haunted. We tried waking up his dad, but he slept on, and instead we turned on every light outside his dad's room and retreated to a recliner at the foot of his bed that faced the open door into the lit hallway. We were covered up to our necks by a blanket and wielding rollerblades, unable to find my cap gun. Our eyes are on the hallway, or more like the hallway wall lit up by the stained hallway light. We whisper things every now and then about what we should do if somebody's actually in the house, about if my friend had ever noticed anything weird about his house before, about if we should just go for broke and jump on his dad's bed or something to wake him up, just trying to wait out the night.

I'm staring into that yellow hallway, and everything is starting to catch up to me. Sugar, paranoia, sleep deprivation, that color is burned into my mind. Anybody who's ever stared at a static thing for long periods of time under those conditions understands that you start hallucinating small movements and changes, and then was no different, I even understood it at that age. At one point, staring hard into that wall I saw one of those changes, the most imperceptible difference in lighting moving from left to right across the wall. In that hyper alert state it was enough to make me jump a little, but was nothing more than reaction and I realized I was just seeing things.

I went cold, my eyes started tearing up, I quickly asked him what he saw, hoping he would describe something else. Nope, he described it to a T, exactly what I had seen. We dropped the rollerblades and pulled up the covers further, I was terrified. From down the hallway we heard two or three clicks that sounded enough like my cap gun dry firing to put the finishing touches on us, and we immediately ran over to his dad and woke him up without even trying to be casual about it now.

I don't remember much after that, but I think we told them that we thought there was somebody in the house, because we knew we couldn't tell him that we thought we saw a ghost or something stupid like that. It was starting to get light at that point, and after he had gone around checking everything we had settled down a lot, probably feeling more like idiots than anything. He yelled at us a little for being up late and having all the lights on, but nothing worse. I never remember us asking him if he had come down the stairs earlier in the night, we probably just forgot about it. I ended up finding the cap gun in my friend's room, where I had left it as far as I knew, in the "direction" the whatever had moved.

That was the only time anything strange happened there that I personally was witness to, despite staying over there quite a bit for a few years.